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SUBJECT: SURVEY POINTS TO SUCCESS IN COUNTER NARCOTIC
COMMUNICATIONS

REF: N/A

SUMMARY

(1) Counter narcotic (CN) messages are reaching Afghans nationwide and within the poppy eradication provinces (PEP), reports a public opinion survey conducted in late November by a major polling company commissioned by INL/Kabul. Some 75 percent of Afghans have heard CN messages on radio; 73% have heard CN messages from President Karzai, and 80% have discussed CN issues with family and friends. CN messages resonate with between 2/3rds and 4/5ths of Afghans depending on the specific issue: they overwhelmingly agree that narcotics trade damages the nations reputation, that narco-traffickers should be stopped, and that the proximity of narcotics leads to addiction. However, barely half are aware of addicts in their own communities and two-thirds think that poppy cultivation is essential to farmers survival. While Afghans most readily turn to President Karzai, other national officials and indigenous media to point out right from wrong on national issues, local decisions are overwhelmingly influenced by family and neighbors, suggesting that more aggressive local initiatives are needed to increase social pressure, converting CN understanding into CN action.

SCIENTIFIC POLL ADVANCES CN UNDERSTANDING
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(2) INL/Kabuls first poll since spring 2005 was conducted by Kabul-based D3/ASCOR, an international firm formerly tied to Gallup/Pakistan, that has done survey work in more than 80 countries. They surveyed 31 provinces (but not Nimruz, Oruzgan and Zabul due to security concerns) on a demographically representative national sample of 1041, with an additional 200 each in the PEP provinces of Nangarhar, Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, Balkh, and Badakshan making 2240 total.

MEDIA DELIVERING CN MESSAGES

(3) Television use is growing rapidly, with 35% nationwide claiming to see television news weekly or more, rising to 75% in Balkh attributed to high urban television ownership there. This controversial figure is still less than 88% of Afghans getting news from radio. Newspapers (7%) and magazines (4%) influence small urban elite. Nationally, 42% turn first to BBC radio, 31% to Afghan state radio, 30% to Azadi FM; 22% to Afghan state television and 20% to the Voice of America (Ashna FM). These numbers vary by province but not dramatically.

(4) Some 75% nationally have heard CN messages on radio, dropping as low as 2/3rds in Nangarhar and Helmand but rising as high as 91% in Balkh. CN messages heard on television average 20-30 percent, dropping to the high teens and low 20s for print media. Importantly, 73% nationwide have heard CN messages from President Karzai, and 80% from family or friends. Somewhat less than half report hearing CN messages from village elders, clergy and governors. CN posters, stickers and matchboxes have reached between 25 and 40 percent of respondents.

AFGHANS ANTI-POPPY BUT SYMPATHETIC TO FARMERS

(5) The poll went into detail following findings in spring 2005 that showed 90% of Afghans thought poppy farming wrong. Nationally 82% now say poppy cultivation makes warlords and criminals rich (down to 61% and 69 % respectively in Badakshan and Helmand). Some 78% said it corrupts Afghan government officials (47% in Badakshan and

64% in Kandahar). Some 80% said it harms the reputation of Afghanistan (62% in Badakshan and 63% in Helmand). Three-quarters said that drug crops cause addiction locally; but 50% saw no addicts where they lived (up to 79% in Nangarhar and 67% in Kandahar). Some 67% said that local government wishes to stop narcotic cultivation but is unable (down slightly to 62% in Helmand and 63% in Kandahar).

(6) Afghans are strongly opposed to narcotics buyers and traffickers. Some 79% nationally say that they take advantage of poor farmers (up to 91% in Balkh); 74% say it puts farmers into debt; and 66% describe buyers and traffickers as outsiders (this falls from 79% in Balkh to 49% in Kandahar and 51% in Farah). Some 79% describe them as violent and dangerous, and 76% say that local people are afraid of them. Large numbers agree that they should be forced to stop 81% nationally to a low of 63% in Helmand.

(7) Yet Afghans are sympathetic to poppy farmers. Some 62% of Afghans believe that income from poppy is essential (rising to 73% in Balkh and 75% in Nangarhar, where the poppy crop was reduced by around 90% last year, suggesting that there the loss of last years illicit income is being felt this year). At the same time, in most places Afghans term poppy farming a large crime rather than a small one. Nationally, 68% said it is a big crime (in Nangarhar and Helmand 65% dissented, terming it a small crime).

(8) Significantly, many Afghans believe that poppy farming is a major crime, but that nonetheless it is essential for the survival of farmers.

AFGHANS LOOK LOCALLY FOR MORAL LEADERSHIP

(9) On national issues, Afghans overwhelmingly turn to national authorities for advice. Some 32% rely on President Karzai or other national figures, 33% turn to Afghan government broadcast media; only ten percent to foreign broadcast media and eight percent to local leaders such as elders. Yet overall, factoring in local and regional issues, Afghan overwhelmingly listen to local sources. Family and friends, elders and maliks added together scored four times higher than President Karzai and three times higher than Afghan national broadcast media. Mullahs polled lower than expected, about the same as President Karzai, but presumably many local issues have no religious or moral component on which clerical advice may be most valued.

(10) Overall, Afghans pay attention to facts delivered from trusted national sources, but it could be argued that on local issues their behavior is more strongly affected by local influences by a factor of 3:1 or 4:1.

(11) Afghans are talking about the ethics of poppy farming, and 57% nationally say that CN issues are discussed at home; and 47% say they are discussed a lot. This rises to Helmand where 65% of families discuss CN issues, 84% talking a lot. Nationwide, people say that these discussions make people less in favor of poppy farming (as opposed to more in favor) by 64:6 (this drops to 28:23 in Kandahar where poppy appears to have more vocal defenders).

STRATEGY: THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL

(12) Forthcoming governor-led and central-led eradication may generate popular support for protest or opposition, if people are motivated out of sympathy for poor farmers; or it may enjoy support if people concentrate on their strong moral and practical opposition to narcotics and narcotics traffickers. However it is clear that Afghans tend to generalize that all poppy farmers are so poor as to be reliant on poppy income for survival. This needs to be challenged through advertising and promoted through news coverage, but there is no solid qualitative or quantitative evidence to present to the Afghan public or to journalists.

(13) Anticipating eradication, the current crop of communications outputs include radio and television ads, comic booklets, matchboxes, stickers, banners, etc. These are being designed to focus on two issues primarily. First is rule of law issues to demonstrate that traffickers are being arrested and that farmers will not solely bear the burden of poppy eradication. Second is Alternative Livelihoods interventions, stressing that these are provided for all poor law-abiding farmers, not as recompense for poppy growers. However there is a limited number of AL activities that can be profiled in a small number of ads.

(14) The CN campaign swiftly needs a comprehensive livelihoods survey in the PEP provinces, gauging family incomes, discretionary incomes, debt, elasticity, sources of farm and non-farm earning, irrigated and unirrigated land ownership etc, at a district level or lower. Only then can the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) and other GOA agencies defend eradication in general and in specific areas, thus shatter the notion that all poppy farmers are driven to break the law by cruel necessity.

(15) Meanwhile, the communications officers in the PEP programs have been tasked by the MCN to compile comprehensive lists of social contact points and potential stakeholder allies, for a protracted campaign by district to increase social pressures on poppy farmers. This strategy aspires to mobilize students, health workers, shop owners and others as well as clergy and local government, to increase the climate of social resistance to poppy, generating pressure at the local level where Afghans say that it will make the biggest impact.

CONCLUSION

(16) Print and broadcast messages, plus CN statements from senior GOA officials, have attracted notice and spurred discussions that clearly help strengthen Afghans need to eliminate poppy cultivation. Yet the recent CN poll indicates that the strongest motivational messages come from friends, family and local leaders. An optimal CN communications campaign will inform and mobilize those social forces, helping to turn ethical perceptions into social pressure, and social pressure into action.

NORLAND